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# Writing Up: How Assertions of Epistemic Rights Counter Epistemic Injustice

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# Writing Up: How Assertions of Epistemic Rights Counter Epistemic Injustice

**Beth Godbee**

**S**cene 1: Two graduate student women, Suzie and Janis, discuss a job application intended for a potential employer who has *power over* the writer—power linked with potential earnings and material conditions. As the writer Suzie (Korean American woman in her forties) moves toward strong assertions of her personal experience, qualifications, and skills relevant to the position, the tutor Janis (Jewish American woman in her early thirties) nods and responds with “yeah,” “uhm, hum,” and “right”—what sociolinguists call verbal continuers. Through these gestures, Janis supports Suzie’s assertions, which become part of the application. They collaborate in articulating and writing a job application that involves Suzie asserting her authority and economic worth, something she identifies as challenging because her experiences in graduate school have left her feeling less than qualified. Together, Janis and Suzie negotiate articulations of the writer’s credibility, and by doing so, they “write up” (akin to “speaking up”) to audiences with greater institutional power and more implicit right to speak.

**Scene 2:** Two friends and graduate student women of color (both black women in their late twenties/early thirties), Traci and Ella B., build solidarity that allows Ella B. to assert herself when writing to her thesis committee within a predominantly white research university. Specifically, Ella B. writes about the representations of black women as the face of the black community, identifying what she terms a larger “damaged discourse.” Ella B. shows how this “damaged discourse” has been shaped from the outside by unrealistic expectations for what

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the black community—and especially black women—should be. In making this analysis, Ella B. not only composes a strong critique, asserting her right to enter and alter academic discourse, but she also engages in self-representation. She shifts agency away from the damaged discourse she identifies having experienced herself and toward the act of black women writing their own stories. Acting in the tutor role, Traci supports this work by endorsing (verbally and nonverbally) both Ella B.’s claims and her act of asserting herself within the larger academic context that is largely silencing.

**Scene 3:** In a community literacy program, Christine (a white, working-class woman in her seventies) documents a series of medical misdiagnoses and wrong treatments as she advocates for changes to the US medical establishment. Theodore, the community literacy instructor (a white, graduate-student man in his thirties), affirms, clarifies, and helps to rewrite Christine’s narrative. When Theodore writes for Christine, he performs an act that risks disempowering her. Yet in working collaboratively, they together influence the distribution and reception of Christine’s work. As Christine “writes up” to be heard within large institutions (by physicians, health insurance companies, and health advocacy groups), the stakes are high. The stakes involve *not* the potential of employment that Suzie writes for or to counter the related academic gatekeeping and disciplinary construction of knowledge that Ella B. engages. Instead, Christine writes with the hopes of broadening access to needed medical procedures and quality health care. As such, she writes not only to reclaim her own agency and personhood that have been stripped away within the medical bureaucracy, but also to act responsibly so that others will not face the sense of victimization she has encountered over two decades.

In the three scenarios presented, we see different manifestations of *epistemic injustice*, or harm done to people in their capacities as knowers. This harm arises when people themselves or what they deem worth knowing are dismissed. In the first and second scenes, epistemic injustice manifests within graduate education. Suzie, the job applicant, finds her qualifications questioned, which undermines her accumulated experience and expertise. Similarly, as she writes her thesis, Ella B. finds herself having to fold her knowledge into that of others. Citation practices and committee expectations prioritize others’ arguments rather than recognize how an epistemological method (historiography) provides Ella B. with the means to know and to speak based on her original research. Suzie and Ella B. are not alone, but are among many scholars of color “presumed incompetent,” as documented in the recent edited collection by the same name (Gutiérrez y Muhs et al.).

Similarly, in the third scene, Christine's rights to know and to claim to know about her body and her health are denied. In this case, epistemic injustice manifests within the decades-long struggle for healthcare professionals to recognize Christine as a source of knowledge about her body. As feminist political theorist Iris Young has explained: "Medical and service professionals know what is good for those they serve, and the marginals and dependents<sup>1</sup> themselves *do not have the right to claim to know* what is good for them" (39, emphasis added). It is this "right to claim to know" that epistemic injustice undermines and that epistemic rights promote. As I argue throughout this article, efforts toward countering epistemic injustice—which is wound up with writing and English education—involve asserting and affirming *epistemic rights*, or the rights to knowledge, experience, and earned expertise.

By attending to interactions around writing, this article sheds light on moments when educators affirm and when writers assert their epistemic rights. Certainly an understanding of rhetoric as "epistemic" or "epistemological" is not new (e.g., Berlin; Dowst; Scott; Villanueva). When we put rhetoric and epistemology together, we recognize that writing makes meaning. Scholars have taught us that rhetoric is a "way of knowing" (Scott 17) that leads to "some understanding of 'truth'" (Villanueva 5). When composing words, we are also composing understandings and knowledges (Dowst 66), hence constructing and making sense of ideology, power, and relations (Berlin 84–7). To say that rhetoric is epistemic, then, we link rhetoric with meaning-making, knowledge construction, and making sense of the world.

Adding to the discipline's understanding of rhetoric as epistemic, the language of "rights" (i.e., epistemic rights) helps us to name how knowers (writers themselves) can be hurt, dismissed, or undermined. I argue that in composition and rhetoric, we need to bring attention to the related terms and conceptual frameworks of *epistemic rights* and *epistemic injustice*. In making this argument, I hope that we can build on the existing and foundational understandings of rhetoric as epistemic, but not stop there. Instead, these two terms—*epistemic rights* and *epistemic injustice*—help to explain the wrongs (micro-inequities leading to macro-injustices) that manifest when writers are stripped of language, experience, or expertise and their attendant agency, confidence, and even personhood. As such, this study highlights both the social stakes involved and the interactional work needed for putting one's words into the world.

Assertions of epistemic rights can counter epistemic injustice by contesting inequities and violations that are enabled through asymmetrical power relations, or *power over*. Asymmetrical power places epistemic demands on writers in a range of literacy contexts. Too often, asymmetrical power limits the voices and writing of people historically marginalized, disenfranchised, silenced, or controlled—

for example, women, people of color, poor people (see, e.g., Gilyard; hooks; Horner, Lu, and Matsuda; Richardson; Spivak; I. Young; V. Young). Attention to epistemic rights underlines the work of “writing up” to audiences with greater institutional power and more implicit right to speak. When writing up, writers are positioned to “upgrade” their epistemic rights—that is, to assert authority in writing and to negotiate their agency and rights. (We might think of situations in which we’d be encouraged to “Speak up!” and what it would mean to say the parallel: “Write up!”) For example, writing up happens in educational and work contexts when students write to professors and applicants write to employers. It also happens in advocacy and community contexts, as we see Christine reclaim her personhood by advocating for healthcare reform.

To home in on this particularly powerful case of writing up, I focus on the ways in which Christine and Theodore act as partners—with Theodore effectively affirming and Christine effectively asserting epistemic rights. By contextualizing Christine and Theodore’s relationship and then focusing on a span of their talk, I analyze the interactional work involved in sharing Christine’s story of medical misdiagnoses and wrong treatments within an overwhelmingly large, complex, and powerful system of health insurance companies and medical providers in the United States. In their span of talk, Theodore helps to clarify Christine’s words by rewriting and seeking Christine’s confirmation of revisions. As a sign of true partnership, when Christine feels they have communicated effectively, she nods and visibly relaxes her whole body—releasing tense shoulders and settling into a relaxed stance. In this case, like in the contrasting ones with Suzie and Ella B., Christine *authors* by *authorizing*. Christine authorizes Theodore’s revision of her writing, which counters the epistemic injustice that has resulted from years of doctors dictating the wrong solutions and those wrong solutions accumulating into a serious case of power abuse.

What we see repeated over and over again is the importance of educators affirming writers in the work of writing up. In Christine’s case, Theodore listens, helps to clarify, and affirms the importance of her story. In Suzie’s case, Janis affirms that Suzie’s qualifications are worth sharing in her job application materials. In Ella B.’s case, Traci emphasizes the importance of committing Ella B.’s ideas to paper, again reinforcing their—and her—worth. These cases highlight the importance of educators recognizing writers’ rights and prioritizing relational pedagogy across educational sites, whether working on or off campuses, in mentoring or teacher-student relationships.

In what follows, I first delineate the central terms and conceptual frameworks of epistemic injustice and epistemic rights. I draw especially on philosopher Miranda Fricker’s study of epistemic injustice, of which she names two types—testimonial and hermeneutical; on sociolinguistics research by Harvey

Sacks, who distinguished between first-hand and removed rights to personal experience; and sociologists John Heritage and Geoffrey Raymond, who studied how individuals rank their rights to make assessments by upgrading and downgrading assertions through conversational turns. From there, I describe how the methodological approach of applied conversation analysis (CA) allows for recognizing affirmations and assertions of epistemic rights as they can be seen and studied in interactions around writing. I then attend closely to the case involving Christine and Theodore, comparing their interactions with those of Suzie and Janis in scene one and Ella B. and Traci in scene two.

### CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORKS: EPISTEMIC INJUSTICE AND EPISTEMIC RIGHTS

Though we don't often use the term *epistemic rights* in writing studies, I see value in adopting an understanding of rights as related to one's entitlement to experience or knowledge—the basis on which we write or ask students to write. The term *epistemic rights* helps us to name the wrong done when, as Elaine Richardson says of school English, “It looks you in the face and tells you, you don't even know what you know” (200). Through sharing her own story, Richardson relates how systemic injustice—like linguistic prejudice and racism—become everyday and personal, as individuals (and their experiences and knowledge) are discredited. Epistemic rights, therefore, encompass rights to know, experience, express, name, and narrate. And a concrete step toward upholding these rights is naming them as *rights*. As such, asserting epistemic rights *in writing* involves agency, particularly when writers are positioned to write up, or to navigate asymmetrical power—as is commonly the case when, for instance, applicants write to employers, students to instructors, consumers to corporations, or patients to physicians. Asymmetrical power is too often abused and writers too often dismissed when their contributions are not invited, preferred, taken up, or listened for as others' might be.

Writers are denied these rights because of complex and intertwined prejudices, including linguistic prejudice (e.g., Zuidema), which can lead readers to unfairly deflate or dismiss *some* writers' credibility. Though not named as such, this phenomenon of epistemic injustice is well documented not only in the Students' Right to Their Own Language (SRTOL) resolution, but also in subsequent work on language diversity (e.g., Horner, Lu, and Matsuda; Perryman-Clark, Kirkland, and Jackson; Richardson; Smitherman and Villanueva) and translingualism (e.g., Canagarajah; Horner et al.). Scholars working on language policy have long been calling our attention to the ways in which linguistic prejudice underwrites the “writing off” of some people. This writing off, in turn, is related

to microinequities (Rowe) and microaggressions (e.g., Nadal; Sue et al.; Sue; V. Young) of which the “pathologizing of cultural values/communication styles” (Nadal 42–3) is a noted example.

Beyond writing studies, a number of philosophers and sociolinguists have taken up questions of epistemic agency, (in)justice, entitlement, and rights (e.g., Alcoff; Coady; Glen and LeBaron; Heritage and Raymond; Sacks; Spivak).<sup>2</sup> Among these researchers, Miranda Fricker provides an in-depth analysis of two types of epistemic injustice—testimonial injustice and hermeneutical injustice—and identifies the associations among power, prejudice, and the ethics of knowing. Fricker gives these definitions:

*Testimonial injustice* occurs when prejudice causes a hearer to give a deflated level of credibility to a speaker’s word; *hermeneutical injustice* occurs at a prior stage, when a gap in collective interpretive resources puts someone at an unfair disadvantage when it comes to making sense of their social experiences. (1)

Both types of epistemic injustice are enabled by prejudice, and both have rippling effects of negatively affecting someone in their capacity as a knower—and, by extension, as a speaker, reporter, informant, communicator, and *writer*.

Here I focus on testimonial injustice, which impacts a writer’s credibility and reception. Testimonial injustice helps us see the links among seemingly innocuous feedback, linguistic privilege and prejudice, wider systems of power and oppression, and the marginalization and dehumanization of writers. This injustice results in a whole host of primary and secondary harms, including attacks on a person’s authority and, subsequently, on their human value. Think here of Gloria Anzaldúa’s line: “So, if you want to really hurt me, talk badly about my language” (59). Primary and secondary harms impact individuals on at least three levels: personal, social, and structural. For instance, Fricker shows that persistent testimonial injustice may result in internal impacts like the loss of intellectual courage, lowered self-confidence, and hindered educational development. As with other microinequities and microaggressions, the impact of epistemic injustice accumulates over time and feeds the very prejudices and related injustices that bring it about.

All three scenes that open this article illustrate testimonial injustice. In each case, systemic privilege and prejudice call into question and potentially undermine the writer’s right to know and to speak/write about what they know. Through this undermining, testimonial injustice impacts most people whose identity memberships are marginalized/oppressed/Othered in some way, whether because of race, class, gender, or other always-intersecting identities. Those privileged have their rights to know and judge elevated, receiving “epistemic excess” at the expense of others who have “epistemic deficit” (Fricker 17–40).

Then writers, who have not necessarily positioned or authorized themselves to “write up,” are covertly forced to counter testimonial injustice through simply writing, which provides the exigence for realizing rights.

As a starting point for thinking about epistemic rights, we might consider the social stakes involved in speaking and, by extension, in writing. As sociolinguists have taught us, we enact our identities, social positioning, and related rights through both verbal and nonverbal communication (e.g., Goffman; Heritage and Raymond; Maynard; Sacks; Thornborrow). This enactment is both “interactionally emergent and rhetorically negotiated” (Kerschbaum 6). As Stephanie Kerschbaum explains, “During interaction, people make minute, moment-by-moment decisions about how to act, how to accomplish desired positions, and how to respond to others” (83). Yet, interactional work differs according to our positions as speakers relative to others and within inequitable systems. These inequities impact who is—and *who isn’t*—entitled to speak and write. They also impact who is—and *who isn’t*—received or dismissed by others. In Heritage and Raymond’s words, this “negotiation” and “management” of epistemic rights “is no trivial matter, but is rather a part of the interactional ‘housekeeping’ that is a condition of personhood” (36). Though epistemic rights belong to all of us—are intrinsic, natural, and given rights, as well as a quality of personhood—they are systemically denied through “regulation and sanctioning” (36). Stripping epistemic rights not only denies people their production or reception of spoken words or written text, but also denies their personhood. The consequence is dehumanization.<sup>3</sup>

When we speak (and especially when we make claims and display authority), we commit those around us to recognizing our social worth, value, and right to speak. When we respond, we likewise demonstrate our recognition of others’ worth and rights. As Goffman explains, “[L]et a participant whom others would rather see silent make a statement, and he will have expressed the belief that he has a full right to talk and is worth listening to, thereby obliging his listeners to give a sign, however begrudging and however mean, that he is qualified to speak” (95). Just because an individual has a right to her own experience and the related right to speak about that experience, others may not recognize the right. Thus, responsiveness and respect (and their inverses: disrespect, discounting, and writing off) are negotiated—constructed as well as contested—in everyday interactions, all very much entwined with power relations and inequities.

In addition to this understanding that epistemic rights are negotiated in real time in social interactions, sociolinguistic and conversation analytic research offers insights into how individuals “rank” their epistemic rights *relative to others*, particularly in the realm of personal, lived experience. For instance, Harvey Sacks distinguishes between *first-hand* rights—having witnessed, suffered, or been a



part of an experience—and *second-hand*, or *removed* rights—having received the experience through storytelling from another person. In witnessing and even suffering an experience, a person becomes “entitled” to it. Lived experience and subsequent tellings become the “property”—or within the realm of authority—of the person who has had access to the experience. It follows, then, that we each should be able to narrate our own lives; yet, doing so involves the assertion of one’s rights to self-determination. The value of personal experience is not assumed *a priori*, but is negotiated with recipients who are also acting out/in roles shaped by institutional power structures. As such, even when defined as entitlement to personal experience, epistemic rights are enacted inequitably, as personal experience may be undervalued or even discredited.

Moving from Sacks to Heritage and Raymond’s work on epistemic rights, we can see that rights apply not only to personal experience, but also to making assessments and setting what they call “the terms of agreement.” Heritage and Raymond find that to offer an assessment, participants must have expertise or access to the state of affairs, events, or persons under discussion. Such expertise and access index the rights to evaluate and to claim knowledge. Because rights are ranked as first-hand/immediate or second-hand/mediated, speakers may upgrade or downgrade their rights to assess. As an example, when a speaker flatly asserts an evaluation, they also show direct, immediate, uncontested access to the state of affairs. In contrast, tag questions (like “you know?” or “right?”) may be used to defer to another speaker.<sup>4</sup> Therefore, displays of epistemic rights are performed relative to others; these displays are contextually situated and locally enacted, even as they are expressions of power.<sup>5</sup>

Studying affirmations and assertions of epistemic rights, therefore, provides “a window into how the complexity of social structure is produced and reproduced through actual conduct” (Raymond and Heritage 701). Attention to microlevel interaction is far from mundane, idiosyncratic, or simply “small scale.” Rather, microlevel interactions are where epistemic injustice and microaggressions of various sorts occur and similarly where affirmations and assertions of epistemic rights can challenge asymmetrical power relations. As Joanne Thornborrow writes in *Power Talk*, “power relations in interaction are not necessarily fixed, predetermined states of affairs, but are constantly shifting and being redefined between participants on a local level” (134). The negotiation, maintenance, and restructuring of asymmetrical power, therefore, can be studied by looking at how participants use discursive strategies, resources, and roles—all in the moment. Hence, a methodological contribution of this study is the use of applied conversation analysis (CA) for studying the interactional work that reveals how epistemic injustice and epistemic rights are critical concepts for writing studies.

### METHODOLOGICAL APPROACH: WHY ATTEND TO MOMENTS OF INTERACTION

Building on previous research describing the writing-speaking connection (Sperling) and on conversation-analytic studies of writing conferences (e.g., Olinger; Strauss and Xiang; Thompson), this mixed-method project uses CA's powerful methodological and theoretical approach to identify the moment-by-moment negotiation of epistemic rights. CA allows for microlevel analysis of macro-societal problems, as it brings attention to talk and embodied interaction.<sup>6</sup> CA allows us to study interactional, relational work that we typically attribute as having value, though fail to analyze. Hence, what is most prominent is a CA rendering of just two minutes of collaborative composing, or "writing up." During these two minutes, Theodore and Christine revise a sentence to articulate the problem of limited physical therapy. Though the sentence focuses on physical therapy, it communicates much more. It alludes to the epistemic injustice that denied Christine's knowledge of and participation in her own health care and also constrained the epistemic authority of her physicians and physical therapists. More than that, this moment is significant for the interactional work and embodied response as Theodore affirms Christine's epistemic rights and as Christine responds gesturally by relaxing her body. Her physical release of tension correlates with her choice to represent the problem in a way that emphasizes the wrong/harm done. Studying such a moment, therefore, helps us see the links between in-the-moment embodied interaction and the work of asserting one's epistemic rights through writing and revision.

Because applied CA invites—even necessitates—in-depth analysis of embodiment as part of language and social action (e.g., Streeck; Goodwin), this article includes attention to gesture, gaze, and physical positioning. In composition and rhetoric, we have sometimes treated embodiment or "embodied rhetorics" as separate from or in addition to language and text production—a critique launched by Will Banks and Amy Winans, among others. Yet, conversation analysts understand both verbal and nonverbal action as integrated semiotic resources and in need of especially detailed and related exploration. Because this exploration asks us to slow down and zoom in on the microlevel, I focus on Christine and Theodore (pseudonyms). The other two opening scenes, which involve participants Suzie, Janis, Ella B., and Traci (all pseudonyms), provide contrast and breadth to the argument, serving as comparatives to the central case.<sup>7</sup>

The article's cases come from a larger study, in which I collected three types of data: (1) videotaped writing conferences; (2) interviews with writers and tutors conducted over time—both initially when video-recording and over a span of five years, as participants continued to write and meet together; and

(3) documents given to me by the participants. I focus primarily on the interviews, which a research assistant and I coded, and on the videotaped one-with-one writing conferences, which I analyzed using applied CA. For additional context, I make use of the following documents: correspondence between Christine, her physicians, and her insurance company; a detailed seventeen-page medical history that Christine composed; and a letter from a patient advocate. Similar documents help me contextualize other cases.

One-with-one writing conferences take place regularly in campus writing centers and community literacy programs. I chose to study these sites because they exemplify the types of spaces and relations in which people typically seek feedback, engage in writing instruction, and make revisions of both texts and ideas, as I argue elsewhere (Godbee, *Small Talk*). That is, in everyday life, when people write, they turn to family, friends, neighbors, librarians, religious leaders, and others in their lives—other literary sponsors (Brandt, *Literacy*)—as we know from research on composition’s extracurriculum (e.g., Gere; Heller). Writing centers and community literacy programs are often compared to classroom settings, with the focus on educational context. Alternatively, these sites can bring attention to the variable, everyday, and personalized nature of writing talk and feedback, particularly when done in sustained affiliative relationships, the focus of my larger study.

Such an affiliative relationship is exemplified in Theodore and Christine’s interactions, which help us see not only the ways in which different knowledges do—and *don’t*—count, but also the ways in which educators can support writers in reclaiming and asserting their rights to knowledge. Studying these sites can lead to pedagogical recommendations for those of us engaged in teaching—in campus and community writing centers as well as teacher-student conferences and other interactions. And, yet, the implications do not stop there. Instead, as I discuss in the conclusion, understanding the relational, embodied, and engaged work of one-with-one writing instruction helps us understand the value of relational, embodied, engaged pedagogy, more generally. We all, as English educators, have a lot to learn from particularly powerful moments in which educators relate with writers and affirm their rights.

#### CASE STUDY: THEODORE AND CHRISTINE COLLABORATIVELY “WRITE UP”

I turn now to the case in which Theodore and Christine collaboratively “write up” to powerful health insurance companies, physicians, and advocacy groups. In doing so, Christine assumes a writer’s identity, which contributes to her larger goal of influencing healthcare reform.

*Experiencing and Countering Epistemic Injustice.*

Christine has a story of repeated and persistent epistemic injustice, specifically testimonial injustice. Though she doesn't name it as such, she talks about epistemic injustice when describing how physicians denied her physical experiences with pain, when identifying how her literacy background and high school education don't speak well to insurance companies, and when saying how others read her as "a little old lady."<sup>8</sup> The various dismissals she has encountered are based on her status as a patient as well as her educational background, class, gender, and age—identity memberships linked with asymmetrical power. Fricker shows that many features of our identities carry "epistemic charge" (17). Prejudice toward particular identities is associated with "credibility deficit" and its inverse, "credibility excess." The result Fricker names as "identity-prejudicial credibility deficit" (17–40). What Christine, Suzie, and Ella B. alike face when writing up highlights the links among identity-prejudicial credibility deficit, epistemic injustice, and other types of abuse and wrongdoing, such as harm to the physical body in Christine's case and potential harms to one's ability to gain access, earn degrees, and find employment for Suzie and Ella B.

Christine was wronged not simply through the misdiagnoses and inattention to an underlying muscular-vascular condition (i.e., harm to the body) but also and significantly because she was made to feel that she couldn't participate in her own care (i.e., epistemic harm). As Christine writes in her medical history, her knowledge about her own body was undermined:

It is clear that my problems were vascular. Yet, I was made to feel unreasonable, almost hysterical, for demanding a simple and inexpensive treadmill test that would show a lack of blood flow to my legs with exercise. Even after my doctors ordered this test, I had to fight for it.

We know that women's bodies have long been a source of domination and social control (e.g., I. Young). The fact that Christine chose "unreasonable" and "hysterical" to describe how she was made to feel indicates that the epistemic injustice she faced was likely tied to gender, given the etymology of *hysteria*<sup>9</sup> and accountings of how women's pain is downplayed or dismissed by physicians (e.g., Fassler; Hoffman and Tarzian). And the wrong done to Christine's physical body is very much connected with (co-occurring, if not feeding into) the wrong done to her as a knower. Hence, physical pain or wrongdoing to the body is linked with the mental-emotional pain of being discounted or facing a credibility deficit.

Likely because of her deep sense of being wronged, Christine persisted in writing letters, filing complaints, and submitting editorials for years. During her time working with Theodore and other tutors with the community literacy program (more than seven years), Christine drafted and revised substantially

(several times and for different audiences) a medical case history totaling seventeen single-spaced pages in 10-point font: quite a lengthy and detailed medical history. This document served as the base text from which she created shorter letters, blog posts, editorials, and other public writing to share her story. Over the years, Christine's goals evolved and became more about influencing neighbors and nurses than about whether physicians or health insurance companies responded. In this way, Christine's writing became what Paula Mathieu calls "public writing," or "an end in itself" (46), rather than (purely) "transactional writing," or "a means to something else" (46).

Christine's medical narrative spans the years 1994 to 2007, during which time Christine held insurance with a local provider and saw four different physicians (three of them specialists) within the group's clinics. In some ways, Christine seems to have fallen through the gaps as specialists addressed different symptoms and failed to make connections. In other ways, Christine seems to have a case of failing to be heard or taken seriously because, though she educated herself and took an active role in her care, she was denied the test she requested and that ultimately proved important to her treatment. Christine explains in her medical history:

Had these physicians honored my request for a simple, non-invasive Doppler test with treadmill<sup>10</sup> at any point along the way, my condition would have been diagnosed. Instead, because of these doctors' misdiagnoses, I had to endure numerous, unwarranted procedures and treatments. I had to undergo years of physical therapy, two back surgeries, a number of angioplasties, and a fem-fem bypass (which was performed too late to be effective). Furthermore, for 15 years I had to live with daily leg pain, painful surgeries, recoveries, and the accompanying stress caused by these conditions and procedures.

In 2007, Christine changed jobs and so also changed insurance providers. The new insurance allowed her to seek treatment at the Mayo Clinic, and she did so with the support of a patient advocate who charged the Mayo physicians with helping to make sense of "a confusing medical history going back some 15 years." At Mayo, Christine found physical relief from a correct diagnosis and related treatment plan. She also became more deeply aware of how previous misdiagnoses and unneeded surgeries left her with chronic pain and trauma to the physical body, including nerve damage and scar tissue. In interviews, Christine described writing as her primary way to make sense of the trauma and "to make change," or to intervene into the epistemic and other injustices she faced. Christine's writing, therefore, was truly "public writing," or an end in itself.

### *Asserting and Affirming Epistemic Rights.*

Turning now to the span of talk, we can see Theodore's significant role in the composing process. Theodore helps Christine explain how the combination of

misdiagnoses, limits of health insurance, and inattention from physicians led to medical complications that continue to impact her quality of life. Specifically, Theodore teases out Christine's insights into "the maximum amount" of physical therapy allowed. Then, making use of her insider knowledge, Theodore helps to clarify the agent who sets this maximum: the insurance company, who had a blanket policy, instead of the patient and healthcare provider determining need. Because of the insurance policy, not only was Christine's epistemic knowledge denied, but also her doctors' and physical therapists' epistemic knowledge was conditional on limits set by the insurance company. Through proposing sentence-level revisions, Theodore both demonstrates his understanding of this problem and engages Christine as a knower with insights to share.

Advice for writing tutors and teachers often cautions against taking a directive approach, likely because of concerns that educators will "take over" writers' texts, agency over the writing process, or ownership of ideas. Cautions against "taking over," I believe, are implicitly cautions against infringing writers' epistemic rights. Yet, these cautions oversimplify the ways in which educators (at their best) work in collaborative partnerships and as thinking partners to support writers in claiming their own rights. In recent years, writing center scholarship has questioned the advice that tutors should be nondirective. Isabelle Thompson, John Nordlof, and others have shown that effective mentoring/consulting conversations occur along a continuum with genuine interactions *including* directive feedback. Even if Theodore's approach is seen as running counter to traditional writing center beliefs about nondirective tutoring, his approach is reflective of what empirical research indicates that tutors actually do. When Theodore suggests revisions and types directly into Christine's document, he does so in partnership with Christine. Christine, in turn, maintains strongly that their process is "mutual" and "my own," which is confirmed through videotaped interactions. Their process is similar to what Janis, Traci, and other tutors in this study do, as direct suggestions for revision are offered as part of genuine back-and-forth exchanges. What I'd like to underline is that direct or directive feedback does not necessarily co-opt a writer's ownership of writing. Rather, when offered as part of a collaborative partnership, direct feedback, revision, and even rewriting, as Theodore offers, can affirm a writer's ability to "write up."

In this case, Christine maintains primary access and rights to her personal experience. When Theodore writes (essentially coauthoring or ghostwriting), he affirms Christine's epistemic rights by confirming her experience, seeking her approval on changes so that Christine retains sole authorship of the text, and rewriting in a way that magnifies her stated problem. Though revision at the sentence-level might be dismissed as simple revision, it represents a long back-and-forth exchange in which Theodore models and supports the writer's journey at best articulating experience. Theodore bolsters Christine so that

she can share her story in an effective, rhetorical way. In doing so, he affirms the writer, the writer's right to experience, and the writer's articulation of that experience. Even when seemingly "directive," Theodore is not silencing, but upholding, Christine's epistemic rights.

By analyzing two minutes of talk, we find that Theodore attends to Christine: he looks at her, listens carefully, and asks a series of clarifying questions that are crucial to knowing how to frame her experience. Within these two minutes, Theodore and Christine revise the sentence in italics:

The nurse also informed me that the doctor suggested I get a good sports doctor instead. I felt devastated. *What would a sports doctor do for me when I'd already had eleven years of the maximum of physical therapy?*

The italicized sentence evolves to this revision:

What would a sports doctor do for me when over the last eleven years I'd already had the maximum amount of physical therapy allowed by insurance, repeated Doppler tests, numerous nerve tests, and two back surgeries?

As a sample of the larger text, this excerpt shows how Christine (with Theodore's input) positions herself as an agent and actor over her own experience. Theodore's clarification doesn't dismiss Christine as unreasonable or hysterical (as she feels the physicians have done), but instead allows Christine to explain the limits of physical therapy. Studying how this revision is made helps us to understand how writing up happens.

Turning now to the transcript of these minutes, I want to explain the notations that represent Theodore and Christine's interaction.<sup>11</sup> Overlapping speech is marked with brackets, pauses are timed in tenths of seconds, increased volume is represented by capitalization, and vocalized stress is underlined. For simplicity, few nonverbal actions are described, but those actions essential for understanding appear in italics inside double-parentheses (e.g., ((*nods*))). Lines are numbered for easy reference in the analysis that follows:

- 1 T: uhm. it was th- the MAximum amount was because of insurance? is that?
- 2 (0.4) ((*Theodore turns his gaze from the computer to Christine*))
- 3 T: like the maximum amount of physical therapy allowed by [the insurance?]
- 4 C: [every year ]
- 5 C: I probably had physical therapy I didn't know how to make it but
- 6 (0.4)
- 7 C: uh I've had physical therapy. (.) the [maximum the insurance would prov-
- 8 T: [oh okay ((*nods*))]
- 9 C: EVery year
- 10 T: righ[t ((*nods*))]
- 11 C: [for all of those years, uh they had me trying to walk on water, and  
[. . . ]]

Lines 12 to 93 are deleted for space. Here, Theodore confirms that the doctors had Christine “trying to walk on water” and says with laughter, “I guess they were hoping for a miracle.”

Christine does not laugh and responds instead, “Yeah, I guess so” (with the emotional tenor of sadness and perhaps bitterness). She relates more of her history with physical therapy—that she could not walk from the parking lot into the doctor’s office. Line 94 resumes after this explanation with Theodore confirming:

- 94 T: okay. that all makes sense. the REASON why I was asking about that was  
 95 just because when you’re saying the maximum amount uh it raises the question  
 96 of maximum amount because why right in other words- was it because that’s  
 97 all your body could [take? or was it because  
 98 C: [no. ((shakes head))  
 99 T: that was all [that you were allowed to do and SO  
 100 C: [oh ((shakes head))  
 101 T: I was just [thinking if we could just say, .hh [allowed by insurance] then that  
 102 T: [(left hand points to screen)) [((tracks fingers across screen))  
 103 C: [allowed by insurance]  
 104 T: just makes it jus that [little bit] more clear  
 105 C: [okay. ]  
 106 T: does that [make se-?  
 107 C: [alright m-okay ((nods))  
 108 T: So, So, instead of reading  
 109 (0.5)  
 110 T: uhm (0.3) what would a sports doctor do for me, when I had already had  
 111 eleven years with the maximum of physical therapy. .hh  
 112 T: instead of reading that way, um the the new way, would read (0.6) what would a  
 113 sports doctor do for me, (0.4) ((swallows)) when over the last eleven years I’d  
 114 already had the maximum amount of physical therapy allowed by insurance,  
 115 repeated Doppler tests numerous nerve tests and two back surgeries.  
 116 C: mhm, excellent hhm hhm- [I yes I ] uh yes  
 117 T: [you like that?]  
 118 C: I [like that. ((nods and visibly relaxes whole body))  
 119 T: [okay

Concurrent to lines 118 and 119, Christine nods, opens her mouth, moves her shoulders side-to-side, and then settles into a more relaxed position with a visible release of tension.

A close analysis of this span of talk reveals more than a mundane composing sequence (a sentence-level revision). Theodore and Christine work toward a fuller description of the limits of physical therapy, which builds toward a full embodied release of tension when Christine nods and moves back and forth—from tight lips to openness of her mouth speaking; from her head held straight and forward toward the computer to a dip from side-to-side. This physical release and build-up to the final utterances (“You like that?” and “I like that”)



stand as an important counterpoint to the assaults on Christine's body and the accompanying tension that she visibly carries. When Theodore turns from the computer, gazes at Christine, and asks "the maximum amount was because of insurance?" (line 1), he positions Christine as the informant and author of her own experience, giving her epistemic authority to clarify the reason for a maximum of physical therapy. Christine continues looking at the computer, frowning, so after a pause (line 2), Theodore asks a second time and again provides a possible explanation for the maximum: "like the maximum amount of physical therapy allowed by insurance?" (line 3). Rather than simply affirming this reason (yes or no), Christine emphasizes the time involved: "Every year, I probably had physical therapy . . . the maximum insurance would provide every year . . . for all of those years" (lines 4–11). By repeating "every year" twice (lines 4 and 9) and then adding "for all those years" (line 11), Christine emphasizes not why the maximum was in place, but that she did the maximum amount for many years—perhaps emphasizing the effort she put in and the struggle involved.

As Christine elaborates on her physical therapy experience, beginning in line 11 with "they had me trying to walk on water" and continuing through line 93, Theodore gives his absolute attention to Christine. Throughout Christine's explanation, Theodore gazes at Christine (not the computer screen), leaning back so that his body is away from the computer. Theodore's body positioning communicates his changed stance from writer/typer to listener/receiver. Picking up at line 94, Theodore responds to Christine's accounts, "okay, that all makes sense"—providing confirmation that he has heard and understood Christine—and then gives an accounting for his original question: "The reason why I was asking about that just because when you're saying the maximum amount, it raises the question of maximum amount why. In other words, was it because that's all your body could take, or that was all that you were allowed to do?" (lines 94–99). Throughout Theodore's explanation, he and Christine are gazing at each other, so that he is able to see Christine shake her head (line 98) when he gives the first (incorrect) explanation "because that's all your body could take?" (line 97). When he gives the second (correct) explanation—"or was it because that was all that you were allowed to do?" (lines 97 and 99)—Christine overlaps with "oh" and again shakes her head (line 100), indicating that she has understood the possible confusion. Throughout this sequence, Theodore shows a willingness to listen and learn from Christine's first-hand knowledge. To support her lived experience, he works to clarify and construct the narrative for its intended/initial audience—physicians and health insurance companies—who hold institutional power over Christine.

After once again clarifying his initial question with "I was just thinking if we could just say allowed by insurance, then that just makes it just that little bit

more clear. Does that make sense?” (lines 101–6), Theodore shifts his orientation back to the computer screen and gives a preface to reading aloud—“so, so instead of reading” (line 108). He reads *first* the original sentence Christine had written and *second* his revised version. The revision not only clarifies “maximum amount of physical therapy allowed by insurance,” but also includes the additional problems of having (1) repeated Doppler tests, (2) numerous nerve tests, and (3) two back surgeries—problems that have all been established earlier in the conference. More than simply saying “I hear you” or “I see that you’ve been through a lot,” Theodore’s revision communicates, in writing and in his own words, that he has understood the magnitude of Christine’s health problems and the ways she has felt mistreated. By keeping the sentence in question form “What would a sports doctor do for me when . . .?” he maintains a tone of frustration, and by adding the list that puts physical therapy in relation to other tests and surgeries, he communicates clearly that Christine has exhausted all possibilities.

Before Theodore completes his revised sentence (lines 112–5), Christine has begun nodding, physically releasing her tight lips and tense shoulders that are visibly apparent at the start of this sequence. As Theodore finishes the sentence, Christine offers agreement “mhm,” followed by “excellent” and then another “hmm hmm” and a direct “yes” (line 116), all coordinated with her head dipping side-to-side, while smiling. When Theodore asks in line 117, “You like it?” Christine has already answered with nonverbal and verbal agreement, and still she says directly, “I like that” with an emphasis and upward intonation on “like” (line 118), making absolutely certain that she *likes* the revision. The moment communicates what looks like an emotional release (a whole relaxing of the body). The release may be from having the idea expressed well. It may be that Christine has had her experience received, affirmed, and then revised in more forceful language. It may be from having it expressed by Theodore, someone with “epistemic excess” relative to her own in the situation. It may even be that Theodore has helped to *reroute* epistemic authority—to use Deborah Brandt’s term for how ghostwriting can redirect the flow of “real and symbolic values of writing” (“Who’s the President?” 561). At least in part, what we see here is Theodore helping to elevate Christine’s epistemic authority, disrupting epistemic excess/deficit.

Here we see evidence that Christine authors her story by authorizing Theodore to make strong claims based on her experiences. Theodore, in turn, writes from Christine’s point of view, since she preserves sole authorship over a truly coauthored piece of writing. Even though assertions are mutually constructed, they remain Christine’s when she submits them to health insurance companies, the doctors involved, online advocacy groups, local patient advocacy organizations, and celebrity advocates Oprah Winfrey and Michael Moore. In this way,

Theodore affirms Christine's epistemic rights so that she is able to assert them. What could easily become appropriation of Christine's text becomes something else—something co-constitutive—when Theodore responds to Christine's verbal and nonverbal cues *in the moment*.

The moment Christine began asserting her rights, she also began identifying herself as a writer, publishing excerpts of her detailed medical history and stepping into the role of advocate. Christine's writing occurs at a time of national debates and complaints over health care and, within this larger context, can be seen as part of a loosely woven social movement. Through "writing up," Christine "rights a wrong"—documenting that even as one person, one patient, she matters. Though Christine reports that she has never heard a meaningful response from the health insurance companies or physicians,<sup>12</sup> she did influence others with her writing. Among these, a nurse at the Mayo Clinic shared Christine's story with another patient who requested the correct testing and avoided surgery; a minister showed interest in the story and shared it with members of his congregation; several neighbors said they couldn't believe what Christine had been through and shared stories of their own, leading to renewed and deepened relationships; and her daughter said it was an important testament to what they'd been through together. With Theodore's help, Christine also posted a shortened version of her narrative on a blog, which she continues to monitor years later for comments and number of visitors. As Christine says, "it was all worth a try," and "it made me a writer"—a writer who continues to visit the community literacy program. Now, years after this advocacy work, Christine is writing a memoir chronicling major life events, many of them painful in reliving. But in reliving through writing, she says she is able to release the held emotions of anger and sadness: "When I finish writing a story, I can let go of it." So, even as it is difficult to trace wider impact of Christine's writing, it is possible to see how the agency involved in claiming, naming, and telling one's truth aligns with asserting one's epistemic rights.

### *Supporting Writers and Writing Up across Contexts.*

Like this central case study, the opening scenes have a lot to teach English educators about how we can affirm writers' epistemic rights, what interactional work supports writers in asserting their rights, and how (re)claiming epistemic rights can enable writers to meet their writing goals. In the opening scenes, we met Suzie, who is working to assert her qualifications for a job application, and Ella B., who is writing a masters thesis on damaged discourses facing black women. As educators, we may think about the diverse contexts in which writers face epistemic injustice. For example, genres of résumés, cover letters, and job applications call upon writers to make a number of strong and positive self-assessments, to state

clearly their qualifications, and to write from a position of confidence. When Suzie talks through how to represent herself in these documents, she describes feeling diminished in graduate school, an experience familiar to many of us and well-documented by the contributors to *Presumed Incompetent: The Intersections of Race and Class for Women in Academia*. This collection shows that “the culture of academia is distinctly white, heterosexual, middle- and upper-middle-class” (Gutiérrez y Muhs et al. 3); faculty who differ from this norm are “‘presumed incompetent’ by students, colleagues, and administrators” (3). This experience is magnified for graduate students and enacted largely through everyday microaggressions. Similar to the ways in which Christine has been made to feel “unreasonable” and “hysterical,” experiencing trauma to her body and to her self, Suzie and Ella B., as graduate student women of color, face epistemic injustice persistently in ways that cause trauma. This trauma must be addressed as part of “writing up.”

When Suzie begins writing her job application materials, she begins by processing the experiences—the trauma and epistemic injustice—of graduate school. Like Theodore, Janis responds by listening carefully, relates experiences of her own in a relational move of “troubles telling” (Godbee, “Toward Explaining”); and, perhaps most importantly, affirms Suzie’s experiences. In turn, over the course of an hour-long writing conference, Suzie begins to speak more clearly about her many qualifications and community connections she could bring to a new job. Janis affirms Suzie simply, but positively—nodding, smiling, and offering verbal continuers, such as “right,” “yeah,” and “definitely.” In doing so, Janis gives Suzie the space to talk through her experiences and then affirms that her qualifications matter. They can—*should*—be written down and shared with the potential employer. Though the employer has power over Suzie and though Suzie is positioned to write up and, therefore, may not be heard, she writes from a recognition of her right to speak/write, reclaiming her epistemic rights in the process.

Similarly, Ella B. and Traci collaboratively support each other in thriving (not just surviving) in academia. Over the year that Ella B. writes her masters thesis, they meet weekly: talking through experiences, ideas, and arguments; reading, revising, and rewriting text; and commiserating over roadblocks, while celebrating successes. Like Theodore and Janis, Traci supports Ella B. by affirming the value of Ella B.’s insights—by indicating, often gesturally, that she has heard and understood Ella B.’s arguments, that they have value, and that they deserve to be shared with others. To illustrate, toward the end of a conference in which Ella B. works to assert the central argument of her thesis, Ella B. makes a strong and succinct claim: “The discourse is that black men and the Black Panther Party are the saviors of black women.” Traci responds by snapping her

fingers—a snap that punctuates the idea like an exclamation mark. Traci then begins “air writing”—moving her finger in the air as though it’s a pen—while smiling, laughing, and saying “That’s right! Let ’em know!” Traci’s gestures, words, and physical demeanor all indicate the importance of committing this sentence to paper. In response, Ella B. begins writing, also while laughing. The fully embodied and overlapping laughter of this moment, co-occurring with air writing and actual writing, is very much like Christine’s embodied relief expressed through the sigh and shoulders relaxing. These gestures speak to the importance of sharing with another person the experience of writing, particularly writing that expresses, if not reclaims, epistemic rights.

Across these scenes, writing up (like speaking up or talking back) can be seen as courageous, as bell hooks reminds us: “To speak when one was not spoken to [is] a courageous act—an act of risk and daring” (5). Will potential employers pass over Suzie’s application, failing to see her worth? Will Ella B.’s committee negatively evaluate the writing—and the writer—blocking her path in higher education? Will the health insurance companies fail to respond to Christine or respond rudely? Despite these and numerous other risks, the writers in this study keep writing and, in the process, counter epistemic injustice as they make sense of trauma. Suzie, Ella B., Christine, and *almost all* the writers in the larger study characterize their writing relationships as “therapeutic.” Christine, for instance, likens writing conferences to the healing and health care she has so ardently sought: “For me, it’s such a relief when I walk out of there. It’s like I’ve just gone for a good massage.” Writing and writing relationships may help to transform experiences of physical, emotional, and even epistemic harm into active work to prevent harm from happening to others. For educators, this work involves relating with writers and affirming their epistemic rights.

### CONCLUDING THOUGHTS: A CALL FOR EDUCATORS TO AFFIRM EPISTEMIC RIGHTS

Through the central case study and opening scenes, I have argued that the act of “writing up” makes a strong assertion of epistemic rights, and that when writers (re)claim their epistemic rights, they can more easily achieve or expand their writing goals. The tutors in this study help us consider the role of others, especially educators, in this process. Specifically, Theodore, Janis, and Traci exhibit a relational pedagogy—one that builds and sustains relationships over time and prioritizes the people involved. As a pedagogical approach, relational, embodied, engaged pedagogy is not limited to any particular site—not to writing centers or community writing programs. Instead, it is an approach that invites

educators to think about our deepest commitments to writers and to affirm epistemic rights. And what this research suggests is that when educators *affirm* writers' epistemic rights, writers may more easily *reclaim* and *assert* their rights, thereby countering epistemic injustice.

In highlighting the importance of relational pedagogy, what I'd like to underline is that the educators I've studied (the tutors) consistently prioritize the people with whom they work (the writers). As such, their pedagogical approach sometimes involves *doing less* and sometimes involves *doing more* than is commonly recommended for educators. In terms of *doing less*, Janis, Traci, and Theodore alike actively listen and refrain from offering advice. They provide nonverbal gestures of support, such as nods and laughs, as well as verbal continuers like "yeah" and "right." These seemingly small acts serve as important affirmations as writers take on the difficult task of writing up. In terms of *doing more*, Janis, Traci, and Theodore alike contribute direct rewording of ideas and sentences when doing so can strengthen the writers' efforts at writing up. These seemingly large—and potentially overstepping—acts again serve as important affirmations, especially of the tutor's deep investment in the writer and their success. In other words, the balance of holding back and yet not withholding seems important for any educator thinking about how to enact a relational pedagogy.

For the field of writing studies, this study suggests the need to rethink—or to think more explicitly—about educators' roles in countering epistemic injustice and affirming writers' epistemic rights. Many instructors across disciplines and in a variety of K–university contexts similarly want students to analyze, speak back to, and feel they can make new and provocative claims; yet, students often fail to make strong claims, in part, because they feel they have no right to speak to published authors, credentialed scholars, or established fields of study. What might educators do to support writers in these everyday acts of writing up? For classroom instructors and community literacy educators alike, we need to understand the conditions and relations as well as the genres and assignments that support writing up.

As one starting point into this work, we might return to Paula Mathieu's distinction between transactional writing (outcomes oriented) and public writing (process based and civic minded): "Public writing in our group began (or gained energy) at the point where transactional writing failed. When individual efforts at finding employment, housing, or another form of justice proved unsuccessful, writers turned to public writing out of frustration or a desire for social change" (35). Mathieu describes public writing as arising out of frustration (likely epistemic injustice) and yet motivating more writing (likely through assertions of epistemic rights). This description matches how Christine's sense of purpose

not only changed over time, but also focused on creating personal meaning from the work, reaching local audiences identified through relational networks, and engaging in broader social change.

If educators are to take the potential of writing up seriously, then we might think more about such “public writing,” particularly as it occurs in community settings and can be built into classrooms. Such writing prioritizes the process and the potential to make change. In other words, we might consider more how assignments themselves can better support writers in recognizing their own worth, countering epistemic injustice, and re(claiming) their epistemic rights. Rather than assuming students can—and should—assume an authoritative voice, even when writing up to us (their teachers), we can do more—much more. We can engage in self-reflection on our own actions, expectations, interactions with writers, and assignment designs. And we can encourage writers to similarly learn about and reflect on matters of epistemic authority, demand, excess, deficit, injustice, and rights. These concepts are all very much entwined with asymmetrical power and invite us all to think more about the directionality of writing, particularly what it means to write *up*.

Finally, all of us engaged in writing and literacy education should develop a language for talking with writers about their epistemic rights. I hope to contribute toward identifying *why*, *when*, and *how* writers contest epistemic injustice and assert epistemic rights. Additional work is needed toward understanding—and describing, naming, and narrating—the navigational work of writing up. Think of what acknowledging this work’s academic value could mean for writing research. Might we shift from cautions and concerns about directive teaching into research that considers the conditions in which directive feedback co-opts, rather than affirms, writers’ rights? Might scholarship on audience address matters of asymmetrical power and the epistemic demands placed on writers? Might pedagogical research, such as this study, explore the role of educators in affirming writers’ rights, leading to more relational ways of thinking about writing instruction and program design? Such research is needed, for as scholars, teachers, and writers, we will continue to face the need to speak up and to facilitate collective speaking truth to power. Added to these needs, we might voice the call: “Write up!”

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## NOTES

1. Iris Young refers to anyone deemed “marginal” or “dependent” in society, including those who depend on others—“children, sick people, women recovering from childbirth, old people who have become frail, depressed or otherwise emotionally needy persons,” and so on (39). In explaining marginalization as one of the five faces of oppression, Young writes that being “dependent” makes one “subject to patronizing, punitive, demeaning, and arbitrary treatment” (39) and “implies, as it has in all liberal societies, a sufficient warrant to suspend basic rights to privacy, respect, and individual choice” (39). To this list of basic rights, I would add epistemic rights.

2. I am especially grateful for others who have described the problem of epistemic violence. Among these scholars, Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak takes up the question “Can the subaltern speak?” In her seminal piece, Spivak names many underlying causes of “epistemic violence” (280), including Western intellectual production, international economic interests, and the power associated with ruling ideologies.

3. Asserting epistemic rights can counter this dehumanization, as it involves what Keith Gilyard has described as *striving* “to be more fully human through writing” (462). Gilyard describes this striving for Robert John Lewis who writes (collaboratively, with others) his way out of prison, and it is what “Fredrick Douglass fought for, what Paulo Freire understood, what Precious lived for in the novel *Push*” (462).

4. Heritage and Raymond explain that speakers maintain their own and respect others’ “territories of knowledge,” which include “identity-bound knowledge”: for example, “dog and cat owners evidently expect to be treated as experts on their pets. Grandparents have ownership rights and expect to have the last word in evaluating their grandchildren. And all participants, as Sacks (1984) and Goffman (1983) observed, have primary rights to know and describe their thoughts and experiences” (36).

5. In asking us to consider a “rhetoric of difference” and to identify “markers of difference,” Stephanie Kerschbaum directs our attention to the negotiation of identities as *difference*. Alternatively, I would like us to think about the role of *power*. As I read one of Kerschbaum’s cases describing interactions in a peer review group, I am alerted to difference being *differentially* consequential: that is, how others recognize—or fail to recognize—a communicator’s knowledge is very much about power. To illustrate, Kerschbaum writes that “Choua tries to assert herself as knowledgeable and authoritative but is not discursively recognized as such” (117). I notice that within the group, some communicators (like a white student, Lindsey) speak, act, and are heard from a place of epistemic excess, while others (like Choua, a Hmong woman in the US Midwest) navigate already-present epistemic deficit. These positions of excess and deficit not only align with our “visible” and “epistemic identities” (Alcoff), but are also enacted, maintained, and challenged in moment-by-moment interactions.

6. Though debated whether CA can align with critical discourse analysis (CDA), I see this project as an example of such an alignment, particularly as the close analysis of turn-by-turn talk draws our attention to the role of institutional power in “writing up.” This study might best be described as “social-problem applied CA,” which offers a “standpoint for the social organizational understanding of such traditionally-identified social problems as subcultures, conflict, power, troubles, and institutional processing” (Maynard 311).

7. All data are presented with permission of participants—gathered with informed consent and IRB approval. Following the tradition of CA, the case study includes transcript excerpts describing both verbal and nonverbal interaction, though many notations from the original transcripts have been removed for accessibility.

8. The various dismissals that Christine faced are documented in scholarship on medical rhetoric. For example, Nancy S. Lee finds that, historically, physicians have characterized patients as “disobedient,” “suspicious,” “overanxious,” “indifferent,” “ungrateful,” “unstable,” “impatient,” and



so on (140). In response to this and other problems of the medical establishment, the growing field of narrative medicine (e.g., Charon) encourages a more holistic, empathic, and reflective approach to care. Narrative medicine invites telling and listening to stories—much like what Christine and Theodore do in their one-with-one writing conferences.

9. With roots in the Latin *hystericus*—meaning “of the womb” or “suffering in the womb”—today *hysterical* has taken on gendered connotations and, as the *OED* summarizes, has been “defined as a neurotic condition particular to women and thought to be caused by a dysfunction of the uterus.” In parallel with Christine’s words, during an interview, Theodore also questions whether the injustice is (at least partly) gendered: “It’s unbelievable what these doctors did. I mean here’s a woman who’s been beaten around by the medical establishment. From her notes, it’s all male doctors. I don’t know if gender is a big thing in this, but it’s the whole establishment that has mistreated her.”

10. This “Doppler test *with* treadmill” is not to be confused with just a “Doppler test,” which typically takes place *without* the use of a treadmill. Christine received several Doppler tests, but none of them “with treadmill.” This distinction is important to keep in mind when reading the discussion that follows.

11. The transcripts here use standard conversational analysis notation. A more detailed explanation can be found at <http://ca-tutorials.lboro.ac.uk/notation.htm>.

12. Though Christine evaluates their response as “no response,” she received a form letter from her integrated healthcare system stating: “Although it is difficult to hear that we failed to meet a patient’s expectations, feedback like yours gives us the opportunity to examine our practices. We will work with you to review and resolve the concerns you expressed.” Months later, after no further response, Christine followed up and received a letter asking her to *trust* the outcome: “I’m sorry but we cannot honor your request to disclose the notes of meetings. We simply ask that you trust us to make any appropriate changes to the way we provide care.” This request shows epistemic authority in play: those holding power (in this case, the healthcare system representing the physicians) act without accountability to the patient (Christine) and ask for *trust*—indicating an expectation that others assume their credibility and, hence, their epistemic rights. In the process, Christine is written off, denied her right to see the matter followed through.

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